

Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, May 4, 1806, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE U.S. MINISTER TO GREAT BRITAIN J. MSS. (JAMES MONROE.)

Washington, May 4, 06.

Dear Sir, —I wrote you on the 16th of March by a common vessel, & then expected to have had, on the rising of Congress, an opportunity of peculiar confidence to you. Mr. Beckley then supposed he should take a flying trip to London, on private business. But I believe he does not find it convenient. He could have let you into the *arcana rerum*, which you have interests in knowing. Mr. Pinckney's pursuits having been confined to his peculiar line, he has only that general knowledge of what has passed here which the public possess. He has a just view of things so far as known to him. Our old friend, Mercer, broke off from us some time ago; at first professing to disdain joining the federalists, yet, from the habit of voting together, becoming soon identified with them. Without carrying over with him one single person, he is now in a state of as perfect obscurity as if his name had never been known. Mr. J. Randolph is in the same track, and will end in the same way. His course has excited considerable alarm. Timid men consider it as a proof of the weakness of our government, & that it is to be rent into pieces by demagogues, & to end in anarchy. I survey the scene with a different eye, and draw a different augury from it. In a house of Representatives of a great mass of good sense, Mr. R's popular eloquence gave him such advantages as to place him unrivalled as the leader of the house; and, altho' not conciliatory to those whom he led, principles of duty & patriotism induced many of them to swallow the humiliations he subjected them to, and to vote as was right, as long as he kept the path of right himself. The sudden defection of such a man could not but produce a momentary astonishment, & even dismay; but for a moment only. The good sense of the

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house rallied around it's principles, & without any leader pursued steadily the business of the session, did it well, & by

a strength of vote which has never before been seen. Upon all trying questions, exclusive of the federalists, the minority of republicans voting with him has been from 4. to 6. or 8., against from 90, to 100.; and altho' he yet treats the federalists with ineffable contempt, yet, having declared eternal opposition to this administration, & consequently associated with them, in his votes, he will, like Mercer, end with them. The augury I draw from this is, that there is a steady, good sense in the Legislature, and in the body of the nation, joined with good intentions, which will lead them to discern & to pursue the public good under all circumstances which can arise, and that no *ignis fatuus* will be able to lead them long astray. In the present case, the public sentiment, as far as declarations of it have yet come in, is, without a single exception, in firm adherence to the administration. One popular paper is endeavoring to maintain equivocal ground; approving the administration in all it's proceedings, & Mr. R in all those which have heretofore merited approbation, carefully avoiding to mention his late aberrations. The ultimate view of this paper is friendly to you; & the editor, with more judgement than him who assumes to be at the head of your friends, sees that the ground of opposition to the administration is not that on which it would be advantageous to you to be planted. The great body of your friends are among the firmest adherents to the administration; and in their support of you, will suffer Mr. R to have no communications with them. My former letter told you the line which both duty & inclination would lead me sacredly to pursue. But it is unfortunate for you to be embarrassed with such a *soi-disant* friend. You must not commit yourself to him. These views may assist you to understand such details as Mr. Pinckney will give you. If you are here at any time before the fall, it will be in time for any object you may have, and by that time the public sentiment will be more decisively declared. I wish you were here

at present, to take your choice of the two governments of Orleans & Louisiana, in either of which I could now place you; and I verily believe it would be to your advantage to be just that much withdrawn from the focus of the ensuing contest, until it's event should

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be known. The one has a salary of 5000 D., the other of 2000 D.; both with excellent hotels for the Governor. The latter at St. Louis, where there is good society, both French & American; a healthy climate, & the finest field in the US for acquiring property. The former not unhealthy, if you begin a residence there in the month of November. The Mrs. Trists & their connections are established there. As I think you can within 4. months inform me what you say to this, I will keep things in their present state till the last day of August, for your answer.

The late change in the ministry I consider as insuring us a just settlement of our differences, and we ask no more. In Mr. Fox, personally, I have more confidence than in any man in England, & it is founded in what, through unquestionable channels, I have had opportunities of knowing of his honesty & his good sense. While he shall be in the administration, my reliance on that government will be solid. We had committed ourselves in a line of proceedings adapted to meet Mr. Pitt's policy & hostility, before we heard of his death, which self-respect did not permit us to abandon afterwards; and the late unparalleled outrage on us at New York excited such sentiments in the public at large, as did not permit us to do less than has been done. It ought not to be viewed by the ministry as looking towards them at all, but merely as the consequences of the measures of their predecessors, which their nation has called on them to correct. I hope, therefore, they will come to just arrangements. No two countries upon earth have so many points of common interest & friendship; & their rulers must be great bunglers indeed,

if, with such dispositions, they break them asunder. The only rivalry that can arise is on the ocean. England may, by petty larceny, thwartings, check us on that element a little, but nothing she can do will retard us there one year's growth. We shall be supported there by other nations, & thrown into their scale to make a part of the great counterpoise to her navy. If, on the other hand, she is just to us, conciliatory, and encourages the sentiment of family feelings & conduct, it cannot fail to befriend the security of both. We have the seamen & materials for 50. ships of the line, & half that number of frigates; and were France to give us the money & England the dispositions to equip them, they would give

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to England serious proofs of the stock from which they are sprung, & the school in which they have been taught; and added to the effects of the immensity of sea coast lately united under one power, would leave the state of the ocean no longer problematical. Were, on the other hand, England to give the money, & France the dispositions to place us on the sea in all our force, the whole world, out of the continent of Europe, might be our joint monopoly. We wish for neither of these scenes. We ask for peace & justice from all nations; & we will remain uprightly neutral in fact, tho' leaning in belief to the opinion that an English ascendancy on the ocean is safer for us than that of France. We begin to broach the idea that we consider the whole gulph Stream as of our waters, in which hostilities & cruising are to be frowned on for the present, and prohibited so soon as either consent or force will permit us. We shall never permit another privateer to cruise within it, and shall forbid our harbors to national cruisers. This is essential for our tranquillity & commerce. Be so good as to have the enclosed letters delivered; to present me to your family, and be assured yourself of my unalterable friendship.

For fear of accidents, I shall not make the unnecessary addition of my name.